



Inside Congress

by United States Representative George R. Nethercutt, Jr.

For the week ending April 12, 2002

Welcome to this week's edition of Inside Congress. I am glad to share with you a little of my work in the national legislature. Please follow the listed links or contact my office for more information on the topics mentioned here.

MONEY-SAVING TIPS FOR LAST-MINUTE TAX FILERS

Are you panicking that taxes are due Monday, April 15? You can find information about new tax changes for 2001 on my Web site at www.house.gov/nethercutt. There are many changes that you could benefit from as a result of the Republican tax relief legislation last year, also known as the Economic Growth and Tax Relief Reconciliation Act (EGTRA). Virtually everyone can benefit as a result of changes to the marginal rates, tax brackets, education credits, child credits, increases in the exemption for being subject to the Alternative Minimum Tax, or deductions for retirement plans, business travel or moving.

LEGISLATION

This week I became a cosponsor of **H.R. 984**, introduced by Rep. Dave Camp of Michigan. The bill would repeal the Special Occupation Tax for wineries, which is \$1,000 per year per location. The tax is a significant burden on Washington state's burgeoning wineries, almost all of which are small businesses trying to grow in spite of heavy regulation and taxation. I also signed a letter to Chairman Thomas of the Ways and Means Committee urging that the committee pass legislation repealing the tax this year.

I became a cosponsor **H.R. 1956**, the Minor Use and Minor Species Animal Health Act of 2001, introduced by Rep. Chip Pickering of Mississippi. This legislation would create a program similar to the successful human Orphan Drug Program that has increased the availability of drugs to treat rare animal diseases, incorporate proposals made by the FDA's Center for Veterinary Medicine to increase the availability of drugs for minor species or uncommon conditions in all animals, create incentives for animal drug manufacturers to invest in product development and obtain FDA-drug marketing authorization, and create mechanisms to alleviate the shortage of approved drugs while maintaining and ensuring protection of the public health.

I coordinated several letters this week to the Commerce, Justice, State, Judiciary and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee. As co-chair of the

Northern Border Caucus, I urged the Subcommittee include \$76 million for an additional 570 Border Patrol agents and \$34 million to hire, train and deploy 460 additional immigration inspectors above current levels to enhance border security at ports of entry on land.

In addition, I highlighted the infrastructure and facility deficiencies along our northern border, particularly improvements needed along the border in Eastern Washington. Also included was support for an automated, biometric entry-exit system to help prevent terrorists from entering the country and track those who have overstayed their visas.

I also coordinated a letter, signed by the entire Washington State delegation, in **support of the Jail Booking and Reporting System project in Washington state**. Over the last three years, Congress has entered into a partnership with the State of Washington to develop this web-based system. The Washington State Legislature has committed operations funding, while Congress has appropriated funds for the initial computer infrastructure. When completed, JBRS will allow any law enforcement officer, judge, corrections officer or prosecutor to know a suspect's complete arrest and incarceration history throughout the state on a "real-time" basis. JBRS will create a powerful investigative tool. Such a system would be unique to the country, and will surely be used as a model for other state agencies.

Finally, I sent a letter signed by the Washington State delegation in support of additional **funding for the Washington State Methamphetamine Initiative**. Meth is rapidly becoming the most dangerous drug in the United States. Production in Washington State continues to skyrocket, resulting in the unfortunate distinction of being second only to California in the number of labs encountered. In 2001, 1,886 labs were discovered - up from 1,454 labs in 2000. In addition, drug treatment admissions for meth use have increased over 600 percent over the past seven years. I was pleased to secure almost \$900,000 for Northeastern Washington for fiscal year 2002 to combat this problem.

ON THE FLOOR

Here is a recap of the legislative activity for the week

H.R. 3991 -- Taxpayer Protection and IRS Accountability Act of 2002. The bill failed by a vote of 205 – 219. I voted yes.

I voted for this bill because it enhances protections for taxpayers. This legislation would assist taxpayers by reforming the penalty and interest sections of the Internal Revenue Code and provide new safeguards against unfair IRS collection procedures. For example, the legislation would have allowed the IRS to waive penalties for unintentional violations. The measure would improve the efficiency of tax administration and increases confidentiality of taxpayer information.

Additionally, the measure would increase the authorization for Low Income Taxpayer Clinics that provide valuable assistance to taxpayers.

H.R. 3762 -- Pension Security Act of 2002. The bill passed 255-163. I voted yes.

The Pension Security Act is based on President Bush's pension reform proposal, includes new safeguards and options to help workers preserve and enhance their retirement security, and insists on greater accountability from companies and senior corporate executives during "blackout" periods when rank-and-file workers are unable to change investments in their retirement accounts. Workers must be fully prepared with the tools they need to protect and enhance their retirement savings. Specifically, the Pension Security Act includes the following worker protections:

--Giving Workers Freedom To Diversify. The Pension Security Act gives employees new freedom to sell company stock and diversify into other investment options.

--Clarifying that Employers are Responsible for Worker Savings During Blackouts. The Pension Security Act clarifies that companies have a fiduciary responsibility for workers' savings during blackout periods.

--Giving Workers Better Information About Their Pensions. H.R. 3762 requires companies to give workers quarterly benefit statements that include information about accounts, including the value of their assets, their rights to diversify, and the importance of maintaining a diversified portfolio.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

I always enjoy hearing from you. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of assistance to you in any matter. Here are some of the ways you may reach me, especially if you know of others who may want to receive this report each week:

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